

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Survey # 67/4-1

Building Date 1937; add'n 1968

Building Name Greenbelt Center School

Location 11 Crescent Road, Greenbelt, Maryland

Open to Public: ☒ Yes ☐ No Occupied: ☒ Yes ☐ No Use: school

The Greenbelt Center School is a L-shaped building, centrally located next to the Municipal Building and separated from Crescent Road by a park. It has a white block exterior with dark green window trim and has bas relief sculpted panels along the front facade of the building. It has curved aerodynamic struts along the front facade, rectilinear windows and glass brick along the sides and rear of the building. The interior features wood construction, colored tile designs on floors and walls and original fixtures. Bas - relief sculpted panels along the front facade of the building depict the Preamble to the Constitution. The 1937 building and its 1968 addition to the rear consists of 5 levels.

The Greenbelt Center School is significant as an outstanding example of the streamlined phase of the Art Deco style of architecture, being low in scale and combining straight and simple lines and streamlined form. The bas relief sculpted panels were carved by Lenore Thomas, a New Deal WPA artist also responsible for the Mother and Child Sculpture in the Greenbelt Center Mall. The school building was designed by Reginald Wadsworth and Douglas Ellington, Resettlement Administration architects who also designed the rest of the original town.

The Greenbelt Center School is also significantly culturally as integral to the planned community of Greenbelt. Built in 1937, the building provided thirteen classrooms for kindergarten and elementary grades during the day and space for community activities at night.

The building represents an established visual feature of the community; it became one of the central focal points of Greenbelt community life, both because it was within a short walk of homes and because it provided many facilities -- music, health, and homemaking rooms, an arts and crafts center, room for religious services, movies, dances, town fairs and political meetings.

The structure served as both the school, community building and library until 1959 when it was sold to the Board of Education. It continued to house the Greenbelt Public Library until 1971.

Maryland Historical Trust

State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Greenbelt Community Building

and/or common Greenbelt Center School

2. Location

street & number 11 Crescent Road not for publication

city, town Greenbelt vicinity of congressional district Fifth

state Maryland county Prince Georges

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u> </u> district	<u>X</u> public	<u>X</u> occupied	<u> </u> agriculture
<u>X</u> building(s)	<u> </u> private	<u> </u> unoccupied	<u> </u> museum
<u> </u> structure	<u> </u> both	<u> </u> work in progress	<u>X</u> commercial
<u> </u> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<u> </u> educational
<u> </u> object	<u> </u> in process	<u>X</u> yes: restricted	<u> </u> entertainment
	<u> </u> being considered	<u> </u> yes: unrestricted	<u> </u> government
	<u>X</u> not applicable	<u> </u> no	<u> </u> industrial
			<u> </u> military
			<u> </u> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Board of Education, Prince Georges County

street & number 14524 Elm Street telephone no.: (301)952-4350

city, town Upper Marlboro state and zip code Maryland 20772

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of Land Records liber 2357

street & number Prince Georges County Courthouse folio 436

city, town Upper Marlboro state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title Greenbelt Historic District

date November, 1980 X federal state county local

depository for survey records National Register for Historic Places

city, town Washington state DC

7. Description

Survey No. PG:67-4-1

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date of move _____

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The Greenbelt Center School has been termed one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the Washington, D.C., area. According to Richard Striner, President of the Art Deco Society of Washington: "In the past three years, in researching a book on Art Deco in Washington, my co-author and I inventoried over 350 Art Deco structures...in the Washington area. Of these, the Greenbelt Center School is in our opinion one of the two finest examples."¹ James Goode, Keeper of the Smithsonian Castle, says of the Center School: "Indeed, the streamlined front facade... ranks as one of the five best (Art Deco structures) in the Washington, D.C., area."² Constructed in 1937, the school embodies the distinctive characteristics of Art Deco in that it is low in scale, combining straight and simple lines, streamlined form, and a general massing of building, and features curved aerodynamic struts along the front facade, rectilinear windows and glass brick along the sides and rear of the building. The interior features wood construction, colored tile designs on floors and walls and original fixtures. The building, including a 1968 addition, now consists of five levels. The addition echoes the original architectural design. Bas-relief sculpted panels along the front facade of the building furnish additional artistic value to the design. The panels depict the Preamble to the Constitution (We the People...) and were carved by Lenore Thomas, a New Deal WPA artist also responsible for the Mother and Child sculpture in the Greenbelt

Greenbelt Center School-Prince Georges County

7. DESCRIPTION (CONTINUED)

Center Mall. The panels on the Center School reflect the idealism of the New Deal in that at the time there was great interest in the common man. The school building was designed by Reginald Wadsworth and Douglas Ellington, Resettlement Administration architects who also designed the rest of the original Greenbelt. Architecturally, the school shares the simple functional design dominating the community as a whole; however, its white block exterior, dark green trim and sculpted facade, coupled with its central location in Greenbelt, ensure its place as an established and familiar visual feature to the community. The building is both "...a fine example of Art Deco and New Deal aesthetics."³

8. Significance

Survey No. PG:67-4-1

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates Built 1937
Addition 1968
Builder/Architect Douglas Ellington,
Reginald Wadsworth
check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D
and/or
Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G
Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Greenbelt Center School is significant for the following reasons: From an architectural perspective, it well exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of Art Deco; historically, it is an integral part of the original Greenbelt community constructed by the Resettlement Administration as a showcase of urban social planning and symbol of New Deal idealism; and socially it has served as both Community Building and Center School and continues to function as a focus of the community life of Greenbelt.

Art Deco became an established category of structure on the National Register of Historic Places by precedent of a 1979 designation of the Miami Beach, Florida, Historic District. Art Deco emerged from the 1925 Paris exhibition on the decorative and industrial arts ("L'exposition internationale des arts decoratifs et industriels modernes"). It was a link between the avant-garde, industrial designers, and mass consumption culture of the 1920's and 1930's. Art Deco proved the middle path between historic revivals and radical modernism's rejection of ornamentation. Streamlining was Art Deco's apotheosis, with its sense of power, yet control. Art Deco evolved from a jazzy, ornate style in the

Greenbelt Center School-Prince Georges County

8. SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED)

1920's to incorporate a newer vogue for streamlining in the 1930's.

The Greenbelt Center School was built by the Resettlement Administration as an integral part of the planned community of Greenbelt, the purpose of the latter being that of providing housing for low and moderate-income persons. In the plans of Greenbelt architects Wadsworth and Ellington, the town was accorded a community building which was to serve as the social and educational center with rooms for libraries, meetings, and recreation. In 1937, the building provided thirteen classrooms for kindergarten and elementary grades during the day and space for community activities at night. On the basis of its facilities, which included music, health and homemaking rooms and arts and crafts center, and the school's location within a short walk of homes, the Community Building became one of the central focal points of Greenbelt community life. Under its roof were housed variously religious services, movies, dances, town fairs and political meetings. The structure served as the Community Building until 1959, when it was sold to the Prince Georges County Board of Education. Until 1971, the building also housed the Greenbelt Public Library. In its present and past forms, the Center School

Greenbelt Center School-Prince Georges County

8. SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED, PAGE 2)

exemplifies the cultural, social, political and historical heritage of Greenbelt and Prince Georges County.

As an integral part of the original Greenbelt community, the Center School has value in terms of the development of American urban and social planning. The Greenbelt community was internationally acclaimed as an urban social experiment. The Center School, in its part, represents the primary symbolic reflection of the Greenbelt spirit.

It (the school) was to become one of our best-loved buildings, for it was here that all segments of citizenry were to meet, discuss their mutual problems, worship, study and play.⁴

President Franklin D. Roosevelt paid a visit to Greenbelt in its early stages, wheelchair ramps being constructed for his inspection of the Center School. Eleanor Roosevelt came alone to Greenbelt on several occasions to study its unique educational and community philosophy.

In summary, the Greenbelt Center School meets the following criteria of the Prince Georges County Historic Sites and Districts Plan: 1a. (character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the County, State or Nation), and 1d. (exemplifies cultural, economic, industrial...or

Greenbelt Center School-Prince Georges County

8. SIGNIFICANCE (CONTINUED, PAGE 3)

historical heritage of the County and its urban and rural communities). Additionally, the Center School fulfills the following architectural and design criteria:

1a. (embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction), 1c.(possesses high artistic values), and 1e. (represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or county due to its singular physical characteristic or landscape).

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. PG:67-4-1

Arnold, Joseph. The New Deal in the Suburbs: A History of the Greenbelt Town Program, 1935-54. Columbus, Ohio, 1971.

Hillier, Bevis. The World of Art Deco. New York, 1971.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A

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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification _____

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tracy Dillard/Richard Striner

organization Art Deco Society of Washington

date November 7, 1983

street & number P.O. Box 11090

telephone

city or town Washington

state District of Columbia

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES (CONTINUED)

Leuchtenburg, William. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. New York, 1963.

Meikle, Jeffrey. Twentieth-Century Limited: Industrial Design in America, 1925-39. Philadelphia, 1979.

Wirz, Hans, and Striner, Richard. Washington Deco: Art Deco Design in the Nation's Capital, manuscript.

_____. Greenbelt Towns. The Federal Resettlement Administration, Washington, DC, 1936.

Churchill, Henry, "America's Town Planning Begins", New Republic, June 12, 1936.

Timmermans, Germaine, "Art Deco Devotees Appalled at Proposed Plans for Replacement of Center School", Greenbelt News-Review, July 28, 1983, pp. 1, 4.

Timberlake, Joan, "Art Deco Lives in DC", Washington Times, March 24, 1983, pp. 4D, 14D.

Van Cleave, Mary E., "We Pioneers", Greenbelt Cooperator, November 24, 1937, p. 4.

Kernan, Michael, "In Defense of Art Deco", Washington Post, December 6, 1982.

Wynter, Leon, "Rallying 'Round a Symbol of Greenbelt", Washington Post, August 17, 1983, pp. C1, C6.

Chamblee, Andrea, "Compromise to Save Art Deco School", Prince Georges Post, August 18, 1983, pp. 1-3.

Markowitz, Andy, "An Art Deco Masterpiece Right Over Their Heads", Maryland Diamondback, September 15, 1983.

Rathbun, Elizabeth, "A Protest for Art's Sake...Fight is On to Save Facade in Greenbelt", Prince Georges Journal, August 2, 1983, pp. 1, 5.

"Saving a Small Piece of History", editorial, Prince Georges Journal, August 5, 1983, p. A6.

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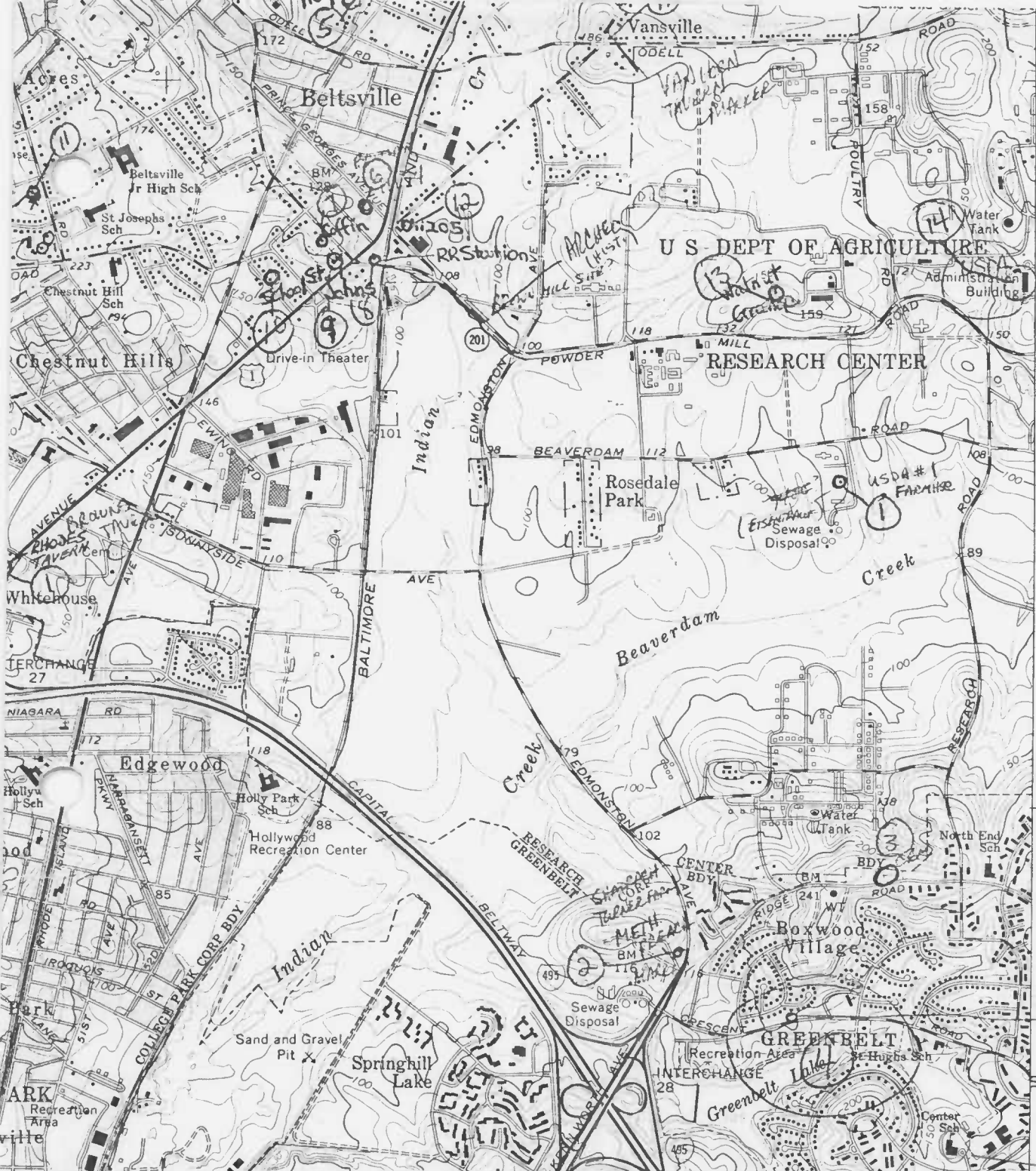
FOOTNOTES

¹Richard Striner, President, Art Deco Society of Washington. Testimony at August 15, 1983 hearing, Prince Georges County Board of Education, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

²James Goode, Keeper of Smithsonian Castle. August 11, 1983 letter to Prince Georges County Board of Education. Entered into testimony at August 15, 1983 hearing, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

³John Ames Steffian, Dean, School of Architecture, University of Maryland. Testimony at August 15, 1983 hearing, Prince Georges County Board of Education, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

⁴Greenbelt, 25th Anniversary, 1937-1962 (Brochure prepared under the auspices of the Silver Anniversary Committee), p. 42.



4323
2'30"

4322

4321

4320

PG.
67-4-1

4319000m N
ADDA E. ROOSEVELT
MEMORIAL TREE

SHOPPING

GREENBELT
CENTER SCHOOL

39°00'

76°52'30"

CLANHAM
500' IV NE

BLADENSBURG 4.5 MI.
U.S. CAPITOL (VIA U.S. 50) 9 MI.

336000m E

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON D C—1969

INTERCHANGE 29 (BALT. WASH. PKWY.) 1 MI.

1 MILE
7000 FEET
METER



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty ————— Light-duty —————

Medium-duty ————— Unimproved dirt =====

○ Interstate Route ◻ U. S. Route ○ State Route

BELTSVILLE, MD.
SW/4 LAUREL 15' QUADRANGLE
N3900—W7652.5/7.5

1964

AMS 5662 III SW—SERIES V833

BELTSVILLE I



P.G.#67-4-1

Greenbelt Center School

Prince George's County, MD

Susan G. Pearl

October 1984

South entrance

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



P.G.#67-4-1

Greenbelt Center School

Prince George's County, MD

Susan G. Pearl

October 1984

South - Common Defense panel

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



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Greenbelt Center School

Prince George's County, MD

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South - General Welfare panel

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



P.G.#67-4-1

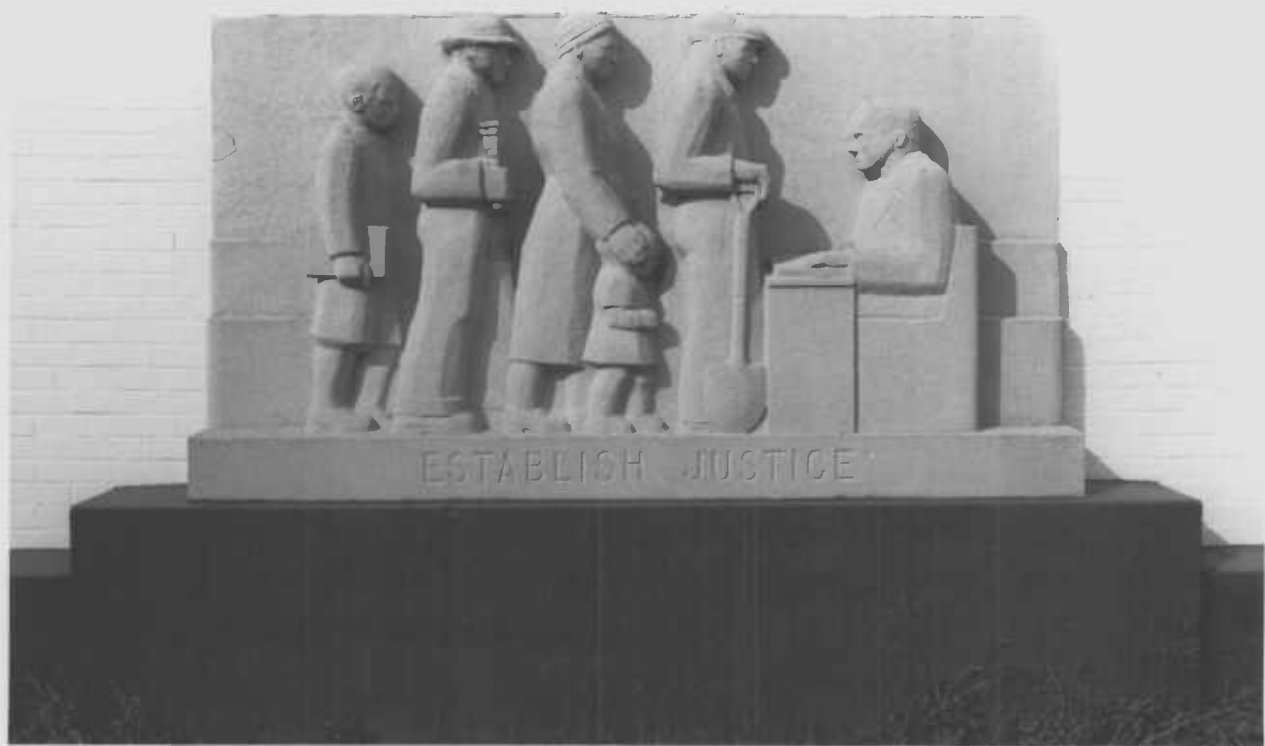
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South - Tranquillity panel

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



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Greenbelt Center School

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South-Justice panel

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



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Greenbelt Center School

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South-Perfect Union panel

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD



P.G. #67-4-1

Greenbelt Center School

Prince George's County, MD

Susan G. Pearl

October 1984

West stairhall

Neg: Md. Hist. Trust, Annapolis, MD